Influences of Houma Ancestral Languages on Houma French

West Muskogean Features in Houma French

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1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

The main purpose of this study is to provide a preliminary description of Houma French:

> 1) in order to explore, demonstrate, and acknowledge the influence of the ancestral languages of the Houma Nation on the Houma French spoken by members of the Nation today, and
>
> 2) in order to lay part of the foundation for the establishment of educational programs designed to teach Houma French in the primary schools to the Nation's younger generations so that Houma French can continue to be a vital living link to the languages spoken by the Nation's ancestors.

Because linguists and others who study the Euro-indigenous contact languages that emerged and developed during the colonial period usually either passively ignore or actively deny any significant role for indigenous languages in the process of the formation of languages such as Houma French, they fail to account for the actual grammatical (morphosyntactic) and pronunciation (phonological) patterns found in these languages. In this study, we take a first step away from such an approach and attempt to systematically consider the possibility of the influence of the ancestral languages of the Houma Nation on Houma French, and our efforts have been richly rewarded. As demonstrated in this work, there are many aspects of Houma French that cannot be fully explained or understood without including influences from the ancestral languages of the Houma Nation in our scenarios for how Houma French came into existence and developed. Important patterns in the use of vowels, consonants, intonation, noun phrases, verb phrases, and sentences by present-day speakers of Houma French can only be accounted for if we allow for the transfer of linguistic practices from the languages spoken by their great-grandparents.

By not discounting the role of indigenous languages in the development of Houma French, the analysis advanced in this study not only provides more plausible, comprehensive, and systematic explanations for the linguistic facts, it also acknowledges the fact that Indigenous peoples such as the Houma have been and continue to be political, economic, cultural, and linguistic *agents* in their historical development, rather than merely passive victims of colonialism. The Houma have creatively utilized the pluri-linguistic and pluri-cultural traditions of their ancestors, not only to survive but to actually thrive and expand both numerically and geographically.

Despite the fact that they have been compelled to abandon their traditional lands more than once, the Houma have never relinquished their traditional openness, adaptability, creativity, and sovereignty. The Houma have successfully resisted becoming the closed, inward looking, mono-linguistic, mono-cultural, and mono-identified reservation-focused, hierarchically organized societies that conveniently 'fit' the colonial mold of indigeneity created by

governmental administrators and perpetuated by academics in order to control indigenous peoples. Instead, the Houma have consistently and persistently recreated their highly democratic decentralized indigenous political structures, their bountiful indigenous subsistence economies, their resilient indigenous cultures, and their expressive indigenous languages such as Houma French. It is our hope that this study will be of assistance to the Houma Nation in their efforts to make sure that their ancestors' voices will continue to be conveyed and understood through the medium of Houma French by the generations to come.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out this study, we transcribed those of the 9 interviews of now deceased elders of the Houma Nation that were conducted between 1976 and 1980 which had significant portions of Houma French in them, as well as 7 interviews of elders who were interviewed by us in French during the month of June 2009. The oldest of the interviewees were born around 1900 and the youngest were born before 1950. These transcriptions were then carefully analyzed to identify the linguistic features that distinguish the Houma French spoken in them from other varieties of French. These features were then systematically compared with the linguistic features in the Western Muskogean languages Houma, Choctaw, and Chickasaw to determine whether these linguistic patterns that differentiate Houma French from other varieties of French are also found in the ancestral languages spoken by the Houma Nation.

Copies of the transcripts of all of the interviews utilized in the study can be found in section 7. Each passage is first represented by a close phonetic transcription using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) on the line labeled 'Houma French'. Below the IPA transcription is a phonological rendering of what was said, using an orthography that remains as close as possible to the actual phonetic shape of the language, on the line labeled 'Phonetic Orthography' (see section 5). Directly below that line the passage is translated into Standard French and directly below that line it is translated into English. Finally each passage is encoded for features of grammar or pronunciation that differentiate it from other varieties of French, but which can be traced back to patterns that typify the Western Muskogean languages on the line labeled 'Notes'.

3. THE HISTORICAL ROOTS AND DEVELOPMENT OF HOUMA FRENCH

3.1 The Ancestral Language of the Houma Nation

Before we begin to consider the historical roots and development of Houma French, it is necessary to clear up some misperceptions concerning the nature of the ancestral Houma language. Brown and Hardy (2000: 12-28) use the data collected by Swanton (1911 and 1946) from two elderly Houma women living in the coastal areas of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes of Louisiana in 1907 to conclusively show that:

1) **Houma is a Western Muskogean language.** Because over 75 per cent of the words collected by Swanton have cognates in other Western Muskogean languages, and because Houma shares fewer cognates with any other linguistic grouping, Houma is without a doubt a Western Muskogean language.
2) **Houma is lexically NOT a dialect of Choctaw, Chickasaw, or any other Muskogean language.** Because over 25 per cent of the words collected are distinct in their phonological form from any other Western Muskogean language, Houma is a distinct language within the Western Muskogean group, rather than a dialect of Choctaw, Chickasaw, or of any other Muskogean language.
3) **Houma is grammatically NOT a dialect of Choctaw, Chickasaw, or any other Muskogean language.** Because Houma's verbal morphology includes affixes with different phonological shapes than corresponding affixes in Choctaw, Chickasaw and other Muskogean languages, Houma is a distinct language within the Western Muskogean group and is not a dialect of any other Muskogean language.
4) **Houma is lexically NOT a variety of Mobilian Jargon.** Because over 25 per cent of the words collected are distinct in their phonological form Mobilian Jargon, Houma is not a variety of Mobilian Jargon.
5) **Houma is grammatically NOT a variety of Mobilian Jargon.** Because Houma appears to have full Western Muskogean verbal morphology, it is not a form of Mobilian Jargon, which has reduced verbal morphology.
6) **There is temporal and spatial continuity in the use of Houma among the members of the Houma Nation from the 17th century in Central Mississippi through to the 20th century in the coastal bayous of Louisiana.** Houma was spoken within the present day Houma community from before the arrival of the French in 1699, until at least 1907, when Swanton collected his list. Houma was spoken continuously by members of the Houma Nation from the time they occupied a part of Central Mississippi up until long after they arrived in their present location in the coastal bayous of Louisiana.

Brown and Hardy (2000:28) draw the following conclusion from their study:

"The most likely answer to the question 'What is Houma?' is that it was a distinct language within the Western branch of the Muskogean family. This conclusion is supported by the large number of lexical items in Swanton's collection that differ

in some significant respect from words in other Muskogean languages and Mobilian Jargon. That this language nonetheless shows considerable lexical resemblance to Choctaw/Chickasaw is due to the close genetic relationship of Houma and Choctaw/Chickasaw within Western Muskogean (and perhaps, as well to lexical diffusion, since Houma speakers neighbored speakers of Choctaw in their Lower Mississippi habitat). Houma lexical similarities to Mobilian Jargon are probably explained by contributions made by speakers of both Houma and Choctaw/Chickasaw to the pidgin [Mobilian Jargon]."

3.2 Indigenous Peoples and Pluri-lingualism

The indigenous peoples of the southeastern part of what is now the United States of America share a long and rich tradition of pluri-lingualism, pluri-culturality and pluri-identification with the other indigenous peoples of North America and the rest of the world. In those areas of the world today where indigenous peoples have been able to retain their traditional polities, economies, cultures and languages (Melanesia in the South Pacific, Amazonia in South America, the forest belt of West Africa, etc.) it is usually the case that children grow up speaking several different languages, practicing several different cultures, and adopting several different identities. Since the populations of each ethno-linguistic group is usually relatively small, contact between groups with different languages and cultures is the norm, rather than the exception, and in many cases integrated formally into traditional marriage, trading, and ceremonial patterns.

3.2 Out-Marriage, Trade, and Indigenous Pluri-lingualism: Trade Languages

In Melanesia, Amazonia, and West Africa, indigenous peoples regularly marry and trade with neighboring indigenous groups who speak different ancestral languages and practice different ancestral cultures from their own. In fact, there are often severe traditional sanctions for marrying and trading within one's own ethno-linguistic group. These sanctions have a number of motivations. Out-marriage is often encouraged or even required by custom in order to enrich the gene pool within one's own group and to cement alliances with other groups. Trading with other ethno-linguistic groups is promoted or mandated by tradition in order to enrich the local stock of foodstuffs and other goods as well as to cultivate bonds of interdependence between groups.

In Melanesia, West Africa, and Amazonia, because of out-marriage it is common for a child to speak one language with his or her mother and another language with his or her father, and because of trading patterns the same child is often required to learn a third local vehicular language in order to communicate and play with friends in the marketplace. These vehicular market or trade languages were usually pidgins, that is, restructured versions of local indigenous languages that facilitated interethnic communication.

Available evidence indicates that similar patterns of pluri-lingualism and pluri-culturalism existed among the Houma and many other indigenous peoples of North America. The table

below, using examples from Melanesia (the Tigak in Papua New Guinea-PNG), West Africa (the Kalabari Ijo in Nigeria), Amazonia (the Tupi in Brazil), and North America (the Houma themselves) illustrates how the traditional practices of the Houma Nation would have paralleled the pluri-lingual and pluri-cultural practices of indigenous peoples worldwide. Since most of the groups in the table are matrilocal, the ancestral language of the community of birth of the child is listed as that of the child's mother, but in patrlocal societies, the ancestral language of the community of birth of the child would be that of the child's father.

Table 3.1. Pre-colonial Indigenous Pluri-lingualism: Out-marriage and Market/Trade Languages

Continent	South Pacific	West Africa	South America	North America
Group	Tigak-PNG	Ijo-Nigeria	Tupi-Brazil	Houma
Mother's ancestral language	Tigak	Kalabari Ijo	Tupi	Houma
Father's ancestral language	Nalik, Madak, etc.	Kolokuma Ijo, Ogoni, Obolo, etc.	Varieties of Guarani, etc.	Choctaw, Kosati, Alabama, etc.
Market language/ Trade language	Market Kuanua (Austronesian Trade Language)	Market Igbo (Benue-Kwa Trade Language)	Market Guarani (Tupi-Guarani Trade Language)	Mobilian Jargon (West Muskogean Trade Language)

3.3 Indigeneity, Pluri-lingualism and Pluri-culturalism

It should be noted that these patterns of pluri-lingualism and pluri-culturalism have given indigenous peoples the capacity to adopt a rich repertoire of languages, cultures, and identities which complement their ancestral languages, cultures, and identities. In fact, it is the firm foundation that indigenous peoples have in their own languages and cultures that has given them the confidence and strength to learn, master, and appropriate other languages and cultures as their own.

Even a cursory examination of the linguistic, cultural, and identification practices of the majority of the indigenous peoples of the world today reveals a strikingly different pattern than that which now prevails in non-indigenous societies, where mono-lingualism, mono-culturalism, and mono-identification prevail as the norm to which citizens are encouraged and sometimes forced to conform. Unfortunately, scholars from such non-indigenous societies have often automatically assumed that the mono-linguistic, mono-cultural, and mono-identificational norms that hold in their own societies also hold in indigenous societies, with ironic and sometimes tragic results.

It is not uncommon for non-indigenous investigators to have as one of the explicit or implicit goals of their research the imposition of a single, monolithic, language, culture, and identity on an indigenous group that they may happen to be studying, in spite of the fact that the people who constitute the object of their study probably have been pluri-lingual, pluri-cultural, and pluri-identified for thousands of years. Such faulty assumptions become dangerous when they are used against indigenous peoples themselves, who are accused by academics and others of

being ‘unauthentic’ or even ‘non-indigenous’ precisely because they have refused to relinquish the pluri-lingualism, pluri-culturalism, and pluri-identification that are an essential part of their ancestral indigenous traditions. In this way, indigenous peoples have too often been accused of ‘abandoning’ their traditions and ‘assimilating’ to ‘other’ cultures, when in fact they are merely continuing to practice the openness to other languages and cultures that is an integral part of what makes them indigenous in the first place!

3.4 Colonialism and the Emergence of *baragouins* from Indigenous Trade Languages

When Europeans first arrived in Melanesia, West Africa, Amazonia, and North America during the onset of the colonial period, they were dependent on the indigenous peoples there for their survival, and in many cases they learned the indigenous languages of their hosts, especially the market or trade languages that had been used by indigenous peoples for centuries before the arrival of the Europeans. As more and more Europeans arrived and their dependence on the local indigenous peoples lessened, fewer Europeans found it necessary to learn indigenous languages. This resulted in a situation where, in order to communicate with the Europeans, indigenous peoples found it necessary to gradually replace the indigenous words of these indigenous market/trade languages with words from the European languages. In this way, European lexifier *baragouins* or pidgins developed for communication between indigenous peoples and Europeans. These *baragouins* normally initially consisted of words taken from European languages which were pronounced and used grammatically much as indigenous words had been used in the indigenous market/trade languages from which they developed. In other words, these *baragouins* consist of European words plus indigenous grammar and pronunciation.

Using the examples from the preceding table, the table below illustrates how such *baragouins* developed from the contact between Europeans and indigenous peoples around the world. The table also shows how these Euro-indigenous *baragouins* emerged naturally from processes that have constituted a fundamental dynamic of indigenous societies for thousands of years, with interethnic contact between indigenous peoples giving rise to indigenous market languages, and these indigenous market languages in their turn giving rise to Euro-indigenous baragouins. In this way a fourth language was added to the linguistic repertoire of the indigenous peoples in each region.

Table 3.2. Early Colonial Indigenous Pluri-lingualism: Euro Indigenous *baragouins*

Continent	South Pacific	West Africa	South America	North America
Group	Tigak-PNG	Ijo-Nigeria	Tupi-Brazil	Houma
Mother's ancestral language	Tigak	Kalabari Ijo	Tupi	Houma
Father's ancestral language	Nalik, Madak, etc.	Kolokuma Ijo, Ogoni, Obolo, etc	Varieties of Guarani, etc.	Choctaw, Kosati, Alabama, etc.
Market language/ Trade language	Market Kuanua (Austronesian Trade Language)	Market Igbo (Benue-Kwa Trade Language)	Market Guarani (Tupi-Guarani Trade Language)	Mobilian Jargon (West Muskogean Trade Language)
baragoiun that developed from indigenous Market/Trade language	Tok Pisin (English words plus Austronesian grammar and pronunciation)	Nigerian Pidgin (English words plus Benue-Kwa grammar and pronunciation)	Lingua Geral (Portuguese words plus Tupi-Guarani grammar and pronunciation)	Houma French (French words plus Western Muskogean grammar and pronunciation)

3.5 European Languages Added to Indigenous Pluri-linguistic Repertoires

Finally, as churches, schools, and other non-indigenous institutions have begun to have a major impact on the cultural and linguistic practices of indigenous communities, the standardized national language imposed by these institutions and the mono-linguistic and mono-cultural governments that they represent has been added as a sixth language to the linguistic repertoire of indigenous peoples, as indicated in the Table below.

Table 3.3. Late Colonial Indigenous Pluri-lingualism : Non-Indigenous Languages

Continent	South Pacific	West Africa	South America	North America
Group	Tigak-PNG	Ijo-Nigeria	Tupi-Brazil	Houma
Mother's ancestral language	Tigak	Kalabari Ijo	Tupi	Houma
Father's ancestral language	Nalik, Madak, etc.	Kolokuma Ijo, Ogoni, Obolo, etc	Varieties of Guarani, etc.	Choctaw, Kosati, Alabama, etc.
Market language/ Trade language	Market Kuanua (Austronesian Trade Language)	Market Igbo (Benue-Kwa Trade Language)	Market Guarani (Tupi-Guarani Trade Language)	Mobilian Jargon (West Muskogean Trade Language)
baragoiun that developed from indigenous Market/Trade language	Tok Pisin (English words plus Austronesian grammar and pronunciation)	Nigerian Pidgin (English words plus Benue-Kwa grammar and pronunciation)	Lengua Geral (Portuguese words plus Tupi-Guarani grammar and pronunciation)	Houma French (French words plus Western Muskogean grammar and pronunciation)
Non-Indigenous National language	Standard English in schools, churches, etc.	Standard English in schools, churches, etc.	Standard Portuguese in schools, churches, etc.	Standard French and English in schools, churches, etc.

With the imposition of standard forms of European languages, the *baragouins* used by indigenous peoples have in many cases lost some of their indigenous grammatical and pronunciation features, as indigenous children begin to master the Standard forms of the European languages which provided the majority of the words for the *baragouins*. In other

words, under the influence of the Standard language, the *baragouins* have retained their European vocabularies and replaced some of their indigenous grammar and pronunciation with more standard European grammar and pronunciation.

3.6 Indigenous Pluri-lingualism, the Houma Nation, and the Emergence of Houma French

The case of the Houma Nation is in all of these respects no different than that of any other indigenous group in North America and the rest of the world. It is well documented that before the Europeans arrived, Houma people regularly married and traded with neighboring ethno-linguistic groups who spoke different languages. Therefore, Houma children would have grown up speaking the Houma language of their mothers plus the Kosati, ,Choctaw, etc. language of their fathers. Such out marriage practices increased as the Houma migrated south in the wake of European incursions onto their lands and they came into contact and incorporated into their communities members of other indigenous groups who were moving southward for the same reason. Well before the arrival of the Europeans, the Houma used Mobilian Jargon or a precursor to it with their trading partners from other linguistic groups. When the French arrived, they sent young men into the local indigenous communities to learn indigenous languages, especially Mobilian Jargon. As contact with the French intensified and the French grew less dependent in indigenous peoples for their survival, Mobilian Jargon gradually took on more and more French words, although it retained indigenous Western Muskogean grammar and pronunciation.

From the very first contact with the French, some Houma learned to speak the 17th century variety of regional French spoken by the traders, soldiers, and priests who lived alongside them and depended on the Houma for survival. As more and more Houma came into contact with the French and their mono-lingual society and culture, more and more Houma began to learn some French and to incorporate more and more elements of French vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation into the *baragouin*. The result of this process is Houma French, which was probably already a recognizable language before the arrival of the first wave of French-speaking settlers (the Acadians or Cajuns who had been expelled by the English from the Maritime Provinces of Canada) into Louisiana in the mid 18th century.

Because many Houma French speakers in the 18th century would also have spoken four Muskogean languages, including: 1) Houma, 2) Choctaw, Chickasaw, or another Muskogean language, 3) Mobilian Jargon, and 4) a Western Muskogean-French *baragouin*, Houma French would have incorporated significant elements of Western Muskogean grammar and pronunciation, and that is precisely what the analysis of Houma French grammar and pronunciation reveals in section 4 which follows.

4. HOUMA ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE INFLUENCES ON HOUMA FRENCH

4.1 Toward a Multi-causal Analysis for the Development of Houma French

The analysis of the data in our sample of Houma French reveals significant influence from Houma ancestral languages on the pronunciation and on the grammar of Houma French. It should be noted however, that we do not exclude other possible influences on Houma French. It is a common error for linguists to advocate simplistic and mono-causal explanations for speech varieties such as Houma French, which emerge from contact between different linguistic communities. As shown in the preceding chapter, such varieties normally result from the interaction of complex socio-historical forces which cannot be pinned down to a single causal factor. We do not intend to replicate this erroneous approach in the present study. Our aim here is to argue for the acknowledgement and inclusion of influences from the ancestral languages of the Houma Nation in the emergence and development of Houma French.

4.2 Common Misconceptions

Unfortunately, many linguists who study the contact languages of the early colonial period in the Americas tend to make the following questionable assumptions:

1) That because the words of these contact languages are often almost exclusively of European origin, the grammar (morphosyntax) and the pronunciation (phonology) of these languages must also be exclusively of European origin. This assumption has been shown to be erroneous, because many of the features of the pronunciation and grammars of such contact languages that differ from those found in European languages are found in the ancestral languages spoken by the indigenous peoples involved in the contact situation (Alleyne 1971, Faraclas 1990).
2) That from the beginning of the colonial period, people of European descent were politically, economically, and culturally in a position of domination over peoples of Indigenous and African descent. Even the most superficial consideration of the historical record shows that for a significant part of the early colonial period, peoples of European descent were not in a position of political, economic, and/or cultural predominance. To the contrary, during the first centuries of the colonial era, peoples of European descent depended politically and economically on indigenous people for their survival, and often had to conform to the cultural and linguistic practices of their indigenous hosts. This was particularly true in the period from the arrival of the first French explorer Iberville in Louisiana in 1699 up until the arrival of the Cajun settlers and the handover of Louisiana to the Spanish around the middle of the 1700's, which coincides neatly with the period in which Houma French emerged. During this time, the French depended politically on the indigenous peoples of the area to fight their wars, first against the English and then against the United States. Economically, the French depended on indigenous peoples for their day to day subsistence and survival in a semi-tropical environment. Therefore, when the French sent young men to live among the Houma to learn their language, it was not because of some abstract anthropological or

linguistic interest. Instead the French needed to learn the cultures and languages of their hosts to survive politically, economically, and culturally in an environment where their own culture and language were of limited use, even for basic survival.

3) That because peoples of European descent predominated politically, economically and culturally, their languages predominated in the process of linguistic contact. In other words, European influences over the languages that emerged from the early colonial contact are the predominant ones, and these European influences are the only influences worth considering. Because this assumption is based on the preceding one, it is invalid. More importantly, however, it is also invalid because no single causal factor can account for such a complex process as language contact.

4.3 Convergence and the Acknowledgement of Indigenous Influences

Many of the ancestral Houma influences on Houma French identified in this study would have been reinforced by similar patterns found: 1) in other Western Muskogean languages spoken alongside Houma; 2) in Mobilian Jargon; 3) in the varieties of European French such as the Western metropolitan dialects (spoken by early French traders, soldiers, priests, etc.); and 4) in varieties of Acadian French spoken by Cajun settlers, through a process that specialists in language contact call *convergence*, whereby a particular feature which is found in a greater number of the languages in contact in a particular situation is more likely to be adopted by speakers than a feature that is found in a lesser number of these same input languages.

For example, in Houma French the sound /Z/ as in the first sound of the word *je* 'I' is sometimes pronounced [Σ]as in the first sound of the word *chou* 'cabbage' (see Feature C3 in the transcriptions in section 7 for examples). This variation pattern between the sounds [Z] and [Σ] is common in many varieties of Standard French (including those of the Western part of France), all varieties of Acadian French, Mobilian Jargon, and Western Muskogean languages. Therefore it can be said that in this case there is a convergence of influence between all of the input languages that contributed to the formation of Houma French. However, when we examine this pattern of variation more carefully, we discover that while in both metropolitan and Acadian varieties of French both /Z/ and /Σ/ exist as distinct sounds that can make the difference between the meanings of words, there is no such distinction in Houma and the other Western Muskogean languages, where /Σ/ exists, but no such sound as /Z/ exists at all. This means that to a speaker of a Western Muskogean language such as Houma, it makes absolutely no difference in the meaning of a given word if [Σ] or [Z] is used. This explains why the variation between these two sounds is limited to only a few specific forms in Metropolitan and Acadian French, while it is much more widespread in Houma French.

4.4 Ancestral Houma Languages and the Vowels of Houma French

The table below lists the patterns in the use of vowels in Houma French that are different from those found in other varieties of French, but which are similar to patterns found in Western Muskogean languages.

Table 4.1. Patterns in the use of vowels in Houma French that are different from those found in varieties of French

V = VOWEL FEATURES:		NOTES
V1	o ~u~(y)~□~ ℘	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
V2	i~I~e~E~↔~Θ	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
V3	α~A~Θ~□~ ℘	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
V4	[+ round]~[- round]	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
V6	u)	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
V8	$v_1 + v_2 > v_2$ more than in standard french	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)

Features V1, V2, and V3 (see transcriptions in section 7 for examples) show extensive variation between three sets of vowels, set V1 [o ~u~(y)~□~ ℘] set V2 [i~I~e~E~↔~Θ] set V3 [α~A~Θ~□~ ℘]. While metropolitan varieties of French show some limited variation in vowel quality, such variation is much less extensive and generalized than in Houma French.

Some of the variation found in Houma French is similar to that found in some of the Western dialects of Metropolitan French as well as in varieties of Acadian French (Papen and Rottet 1997:74-5), where vowels are often pronounced with a greater degree of openness and laxity than in Standard French, but the variation in Houma French involves extensive raising and tensing as well as lowering and laxing.

When we consider the vowel systems found in the Western Muskogean languages, however, we can begin to make sense of this otherwise puzzlingly high degree of variation in Houma French vowels. As the tables below illustrate, while Standard French and Acadian French have 8 distinct vowel qualities from which the oral, nasal and front rounded vowels can be said to be derived, Houma, Choctaw, and Chickasaw have only three basic vowel qualities from which all short, long and nasal vowels can said to be derived:

Table 4.2. The Vowels of Metropolitan and Acadian French

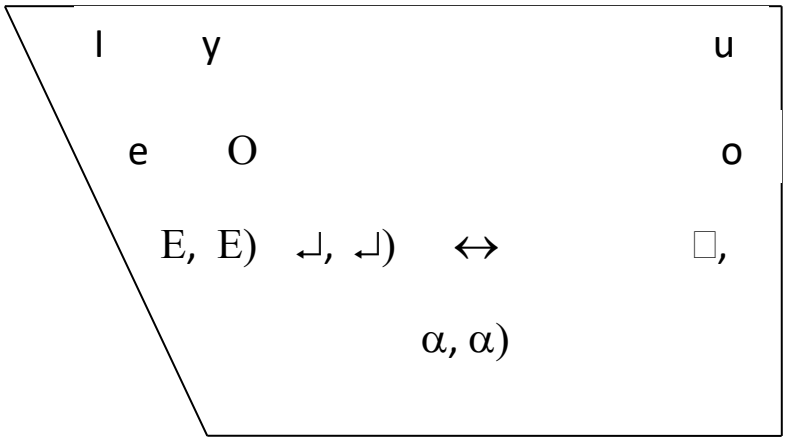
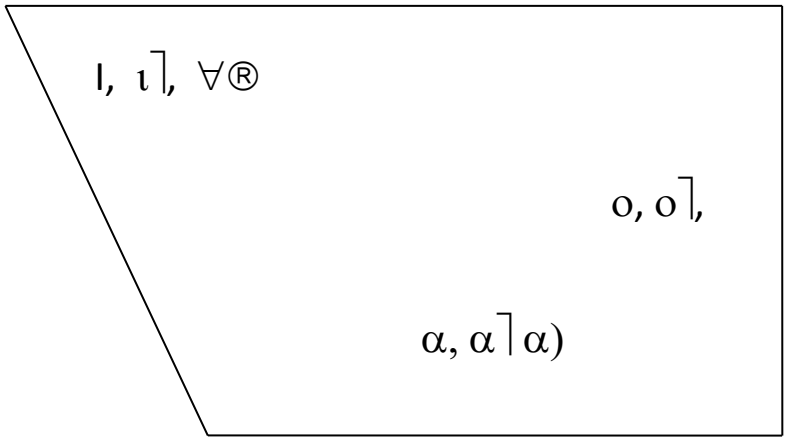


Table 4.3. The Vowels of Houma, Choctaw, and Chickasaw



In other words, in Western Muskogean languages, much more variation in vowel quality is possible than in varieties of French because only three distinctions need to be made in the vowel space. The type of variation found in Houma French is just what one would expect from speakers who are used to making three distinctions in vowel quality rather than 8 distinctions, with all variation in vowel quality clustering around the three basic positions of Western Muskogean : front non-low /i/, back non-low /o/ and central low /a/.

Since there is extensive and distinctive nasalization of vowels in Western Muskogean, we would expect Houma French to show extensive and distinctive nasalization as well. Nasal vowel quality varies in a similar way to oral vowel quality in Houma French, however, so that not only are the quality distinctions between nasalized vowels sometimes neutralized, but occasionally nasalization is possible with vowels such as /u/ (feature V6, see transcriptions in section 7 for examples) which are not normally nasalized in other varieties of French.

While vowel nasalization is extensive in Western Muskogean languages, the rounding of front vowels is not. While some rounded allophones of /i/ do occur in Choctaw, they are rare. As would be expected from speakers who are not used to making rounding distinctions in front vowels, speakers of Houma French often realize the front rounded vowels as unrounded, and sometimes realize their front unrounded vowels as rounded.

While the elision of the first of a series of vowels across morpheme boundaries is fairly common in varieties of French, it is much more pervasive in both the Western Muskogean languages and Houma French (Feature V8, see transcriptions in section 7 for examples). The tendency for the amalgamation and agglutination of morphemes is much more pronounced in Houma French and the Muskogean languages than it is in either Metropolitan or Acadian varieties of French (Feature M1, see transcriptions in section 7 for examples).

4.5 Ancestral Houma Languages and the Consonants of Houma French

The table below lists the patterns in the use of consonants in Houma French that are different from those found in varieties of French, but which are similar to patterns found in Western Muskogean languages.

Table 4.4. Patterns in the use of consonants in Houma French that are different from those found in varieties of French

C = CONSONANT FEATURES		NOTES
C1	t~d	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
C2	k~g	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
C3	v>v~f ~w	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
C4	Z >Z~Σ~s~z~h~zero	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
C5	| ~ w	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
C6	/h/	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
C8/11	ζ~s~zero	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)
C9	⌋ = —)	(see transcriptions in section 7 for examples)

Features C1, C2, C3, C4, C5,and C8/11 (see transcriptions in section 7 for examples) show extensive variation between six sets of consonants, set C1 [t~d] set C2 [k~g] set C3 [v>v~f ~w] set C4 [Z >Z~Σ~s~z~h] set C5 [| ~ w] set C8/11 [ζ~s] . While metropolitan and Acadian varieties of French (Papen and Rotet 1997:76-7) show similar but more limited variation in sibilants such as in C4 and C8/11, none of the other variations attested in Houma French are commonly found in metropolitan or Acadian varieties of French.

While most of the variation patterns found in Houma consonants do not correspond to patterns found in varieties of either Metropolitan or Acadian French, they correspond neatly with those found in Houma, Choctaw, and Chickasaw. The tables below show that while the metropolitan and Acadian varieties of French have voicing distinctions between /t/and /d/, /k/ and /g/, /f/ and /v/, /Σ/ and /Z/, /| / and /w/, and /s/ and /z/, no such distinctions exist in Western Muskogean. This means that in Houma, Choctaw, and Chickasaw, much more variation is possible and indeed occurs between these pairs of sounds, just as happens in Houma French:

Table 4.5. The Consonants of Metropolitan and Acadian French

p,b	t,d	τΣ, δZ	κγ
ɸ,ϖ	σ,ζ	Σ,Z	η (Acadian only)
μ	ν	ʃ	N (Acadian only)
ω	r	φ	
	⟩		

Table 4.6. The Consonants of Houma, Choctaw, and Chickasaw

p,b	t	τΣ	κ	?
ɸ	σ	Σ	η	
μ	ν			
ω	⟩	φ		
	ℜ			

The tables also reveal that the sound [ʃ] which is distinctive in metropolitan and Acadian varieties of French is not found in Western Muskogean languages. This would explain the substitution of /φ~/ for /ʃ/ in Houma French (Feature C9, see section 7 for examples). While the presence and use of /h/ in Houma French neatly parallels that of /h/ in Acadian varieties, it is also distinctive in Western Muskogean, so that convergence could be invoked to explain this phenomenon (Feature C6, see transcriptions in section 7 for examples). While the presence of the sound [N] and extensive consonantal palatalization typify some Acadian varieties of French, /N/ and palatalized consonants are absent from both Western Muskogean languages and Houma French. Gemination is also found in both Houma French and Western Muskogean languages (Feature C7, see transcriptions in section 7 for examples).

4.6 Ancestral Houma Languages and Intonation in Houma French

Suprasegmental features related to intonation and accent in Western Muskogean languages have attracted significant attention from linguists. Intonation and pitch accent has been studied in great detail in Chickasaw, for example. One of the distinctive patterns found in that language involves rising or flat pitch levels toward the end of declarative statements, rather than the falling levels that are found at the end of declarative sentences in varieties of Metropolitan and Acadian French. The high frequency of instances of Features I1 and I3 (see transcriptions in

section 7 for examples) indicates that rising and flat intonation contours are also commonly found at the end of declarative sentences in Houma French, as shown in the table below.

Table 4.7 Frequency of final rising (Feature I1) and final flat (Feature I3) declarative contours for speakers interviewed between 1976 and 1980

Tape 1, Recorded - 06/28/1980, Transcribed - 06/17/2009

Speaker	Total declarative sentences	Feature I1: declaratives with final pitch rise	Feature I3: declaratives with final flat pitch
Ida Dion Fazzio	15	9	2

Tape 13, Recorded - 06/14/1979, Transcribed - 06/15/2009

Speaker	Total declarative sentences	Feature I1: declaratives with final pitch rise	Feature I3: declaratives with final flat pitch
Marie Hazel Billiot Lombas	N/A	N/A	N/A

Tape 23, Recorded - 03/14/1979, Transcribed - 06/19/2009

Speaker	Total declarative sentences	Feature I1: declaratives with final pitch rise	Feature I3: declaratives with final flat pitch
Valentine Serigny Dardar	8	4	1

Tape 26, Recorded – 01/05/1979, Transcribed – 6/19/2009

Speakers	Total declarative sentences	Feature I1: declaratives with final pitch rise	Feature I3: declaratives with final flat pitch
Mae and Charles Billiot	5	1	4

Tape 29, Recorded - 01/28/1979, Transcribed - 06/19/2009

Speaker	Total declarative sentences	Feature I1: declaratives with final pitch rise	Feature I3: declaratives with final flat pitch
Marie (Mathilde?) Lovell	3	2	N/A

Tape 31, Recorded: 11/26/1976 Transcribed: 06/16/2009

Speakers	Total declarative sentences	Feature I1: declaratives with final pitch rise	Feature I3: declaratives with final flat pitch
Antoinette Verdin and Charles Duthu	8	2	3

Tape 66, Recorded: 12/13/1978 Transcribed: 6/12/2009

Speaker	Total declarative sentences	Feature I1: declaratives with final pitch rise	Feature I3: declaratives with final flat pitch
Lindsay Molinaire and Mable Billiot	2	2	N/A

4.7 Ancestral Houma Languages and the Noun Phrases of Houma French

Following the pattern that predominates in Western Muskogean languages, nouns and adjectival words are generally unmarked for gender and number in Houma French (for examples, see Features N1, N2, N7, N8, and N9 in the transcriptions in section 7). Because final consonants are not pronounced in most varieties of Metropolitan and Acadian French, there are also many cases in those varieties where gender and plural marking on nouns is phonetically unrealized. While it therefore may be said that these features are the result of convergence of patterns found in all of the input languages, the consistency with which Houma French nouns and adjectivals lack number and gender marking fits the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Houma pattern better than it does the pattern which typifies varieties of French, especially those spoken in the metropole.

In Western Muskogean languages, determiners and adpositions occur after nouns rather than before them. There is a tendency in Houma French to utilize determiners such as *sa* and postpositions such as *la*, *an ba*, *la dedan*, *an ra*, *an ho*, etc, where metropolitan varieties of French would used preposed determiners and prepositions (for examples, see Features N5 and N6 in the transcriptions in section 7). Because the sounds [α], [ε], [E],and [$\leftrightarrow$] are in variation in Houma French (see section 4.4) the vowel distinctions upon which metrolpolitan varieties of French crucially depend for number marking are often neutralized in Houma French. This tendency is also present in Acadian varieties, as well as in Muskogean where the use of determiners for gender and number marking is uncommon. This pattern in Houma French can therefore be said to be a case of convergence between West Muskogean and Acadian.

In Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Houma, third person pronouns are normally not used. This is also the case in a few Houma sentences (for examples, see Features P2 and P5 in the transcriptions in section 7), while in the majority of cases, there is a high degree of variation between a number of third person singular and plural forms. This instability is just what one would expect in a situation where speakers of languages that do not use third person pronouns and where case, number and gender distinctions are not made in third person pronouns (i.e. speakers of Western Muskogean languages) are confronted with a language like French, where the use of number, case, and gender sensitive third person pronouns is obligatory.

4.8 Ancestral Houma Languages and the Verb Phrases of Houma French

In Western Muskogean languages, verbs may be used in a series with minimal marking to express a single event. Such constructions can be referred to as serialized verb constructions, which are also occasionally found in Houma French (for examples, see Feature P1 in the transcriptions in section 7), but are not found in varieties Metropolitan or Acadian French.

In the great majority of cases, Houma French verbs are used in their bare stem form, which is also the case for verbs unmarked for tense, aspect, or modality in the third person singular and plural in West Muskogean languages (for examples, see Features P2, P3, and P4 in the transcriptions in section 7). There is a tendency in Houma French for the plural non-third person pronouns *nou* and *vou* to be modified to *nuzot* and *vuzot*, which are treated

morphologically as third person forms as well (for examples, see Features N3 and N4 in the transcriptions in section 7). The main exception to this is a polite form of speech reserved for elders (especially males addressing older females) where the *vou* form is used, sometimes with modification of the verb stem as well (for examples, see Feature N3 in the transcriptions in section 7). This roughly parallels the pattern for verbs in the third person in Choctaw and Chickasaw, where there is no subject or object marking on verbs and where a special in-law language is used by sons-in-law with their mothers-in-law (for examples, see Features N3, P2, and P5 in the transcriptions in section 7). The use of bare verb stems and the tendency for forms of first and second plural pronouns to be modified with *autre* in order to allow them to be used morphologically as third person pronouns is a pattern found as well in Acadian varieties of French, so that these features could be considered to be the result of convergence between Western Muskogean languages and Acadian varieties.

5. SOME LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF HOUMA FRENCH

On the basis of the results of our study of the pronunciation patterns of Houma French outlined in sections 4.4 to 4.6 above, it is possible to formulate a phonetically based alphabet for Houma French. In the table below, the proposed alphabetic symbols (letters) are listed in the first column. In the second column, the sounds that correspond to each letter are listed in IPA format. In the third column, the variations on the pronunciation of each sound are listed. In the rightmost column, comments are made as necessary. Examples of how actual words and sentences would be spelled in Houma French using this alphabet can be found in the transcriptions in section 7, on the lines labeled 'Phonetic Orthography', just under the IPA transcription and just above the Standard French and English translations of each passage.

We would like to stress that this orthography was formulated with the sole purpose of demonstrating to the Houma Nation what a phonetically based alphabet would look like for Houma French. Of course, the final decision about how to represent the Houma French language must be made by the Houma Nation. Experience in indigenous communities worldwide has shown time and time again that the best orthography for a language is always the one that the community feels most comfortable using. For example, if the Houma Nation feels that names of places and people should be represented as they are in Standard French and/or English (for example 'Lafourche' instead of 'Lafouch' or 'Billiot' instead of 'Biyo') the preference of the community should be accommodated and would not pose major problems to children learning to read. If the Houma Nation feels that more elements of Standard French orthography should be introduced into the writing system (for example '*oui*' instead of '*wi*', '*rien*' instead of '*ryen*', or '*caillou*' instead of '*cayou*') this should also be accommodated, and could be done without posing any problems to learners. If the Houma Nation wishes to adopt the Standard French writing system for all words with only slight modifications, this might pose problems for learners, but it is more important for community preferences to be respected and honored than to adopt a writing system that is easier for learners to master, but which is unacceptable to the community. In any case, a writing system can always be modified later if the community no longer feels comfortable with it or if teachers and learners find it problematic to use. In terms of grammar, the base forms of verbs and nouns should be used whenever possible.

Table 5.1 Phonetically Based Orthography for Houma French

Phonetic Orthography	Sound	Variants	Notes
a	[a]	[a ∫ A ∫ Θ ∫ □ ∫ ℘]	(for examples, see Feature V3, section 7)
an	[ã]	[A) ~ α) ∫ □)]	(for examples, see Feature V5, section 7)
b	[b]		(see section 4.5)
ch	[Σ]		(for examples, see Feature C4, section 7)
d	[d]	[δ ∫ τ]	(for examples, see Feature C1, section 7)
e	[e, E, ↔]	[ε ∫ E ∫ ↔ ∫ ι ∫ I ∫ Θ]	(for examples, see Feature V2, section 7)
en	[E)]	[E) ∫ α)]	(for examples, see Feature V2, section 7)
eu	[O]	[O ∫ ψ ∫ ↵ ∫ ʉ ∫ ο]	(for examples, see Feature V4, section 7)
f	[f]		(for examples, see Feature C2, section 7)
g	[g]	[γ ∫ κ]	(for examples, see Feature C2, section 7)
h	[h]		(for examples, see Feature C6, section 7)
i	[i]	[ι ∫ I ∫ ε ∫∫ E ∫↔ ∫ Θ]	(for examples, see Feature V2, section 7)
j	[Z]	[Z ∫ ζ ∫σ ∫ η ∫ζερο]	(for examples, see Feature C8, section 7)
k	[k]		(for examples, see Feature C2, section 7)
l	[l]	[λ ∫ ρ]	(for examples, see Feature C10, section 7)
m	[m]		(see section 4.5)
n	[n]		(see section 4.5)
ny	[—)]		(for examples, see Feature C9, section 7)
o	[ο ∫ □]	[ο ∫ □ ∫ υ ∫ ψ ∫ O]	(for examples, see Feature V1, section 7)
oe	[↵]	[↵ ∫ O ∫ ψ ∫ ο ∫ ε ∫ □ ∫ E]	(for examples, see Feature V4, section 7)
oen	[↵)]	[↵) ∫ ℘)]	(for examples, see Feature V2, section 7)
on	[□)]	[□) ∫ α) ∫ ο)]	(for examples, see Feature V1, section 7)
ou	[u]	[υ ∫ □ ∫ ο ∫ ψ ∫ O]	(for examples, see Feature V1, section 7)
p	[p]		(see section 4.5)
r	[r]	[ρ ∫ λ]	(for examples, see Feature C10, section 7)
s	[s]	[σ ∫ η ∫ζερο]	(for examples, see Feature C8, section 7)
t	[t]		(for examples, see Feature C1, section 7)
u	[y, |]	[ψ ∫ υ ∫ O ∫ο] [| ∫ ω]	(for examples, see Feature V1, section 7)
un	[ũ]	[υ) ∫ □) ∫ ο)]	(for examples, see Feature V6, section 7)
v	[v]	[ϖ ∫ ϕ ∫ ω]	(for examples, see Feature C3, section 7)
w	[w]		(for examples, see Feature C3, section 7)
y	[j]		(see section 4.5)
z	[z]	[ζ ∫ σ ∫ η ∫ζερο]	(for examples, see Feature C8, section 7)

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7. TRANSCRIPTIONS

Tape A: Corinne Francis Paulk, recorded 6/11/2009

Tape B: Curtis Hendon, recorded 6/09/2009

Tape C: Marie Dean and Maria Dean, recorded 6/15/2009

Tape D: Hilda Naquin and Laura Billiot, recorded 6/16/2009

Tape E: Marcelit Verdin and Anesi Verdin, recorded 6/17/2009

Tape 1: Ida Marie Dion Fazzio, recorded 6/28/1980

Tape 13: Marie Hazel Billiot Lombas, recorded 6/14/1979

Tape 23: Valentine Sergny Dardar, recorded 3/14/1979

Tape 26: Charles Billiot and Amy Luc Billiot, recorded 1/05/1979

Tape 29: Marie Lovell, recorded 1/28/1979

Tape 31: Antoinette Verdin, recorded 11/26/1976

Tape 66: Lindsay Molinaire and Mable Billiot, recorded 12/13/1978